

# INTERFACE | Atlanta, GA

## AT A GLANCE

**Sq Footage:** 40,000 sq ft**Project Type:** New and Existing Buildings**Precondition achieved:** 41/41**Optimizations achieved:** 24/59**Certification level:** Gold**Certification date:** 02/2020

## BACKGROUND

Interface, a global leader in modular flooring, moved into its new headquarters in Midtown Atlanta's Arts District in 2018. The new four-story office, named Base Camp by the company's employees, brought together Interface's workforce – previously dispersed among several locations around Atlanta – into a centralized, collaborative workplace.

Pre-occupancy utilization research was conducted by Perkins & Will's Planning and Strategies practice to better understand how employees use the office. Despite the employees' initial requests for assigned workstations, the research revealed they were moving about the office during the day—often working in small groups. The research led to the new office being programmed based on employees' behavior rather than what they initially communicated, and laid the groundwork for engaging the whole company in the search for the headquarters' new building and a collaborative approach to its redesign.

As part of the WELL Certification process, a post-occupancy survey, developed by JLL, was administered by Integra in 2019 to all employees to gauge their satisfaction with the new workplace ([see Mind Feature 86 Post-Occupancy Surveys](#)). In addition, a post-occupancy evaluation with measurements (POE+M) was conducted in 2019 by the Center for Building Performance and Diagnostics (CBPD) at Carnegie Mellon University. The POE+M measured indoor environmental quality (IEQ)—acoustic, air, lighting, thermal, and spatial—both objectively and subjectively simultaneously [1]. Physical attributes pertaining to the IEQ measures were captured at individual workstations, while the satisfaction of employees occupying these workstations with the IEQ measures were recorded with a “right-now” questionnaire for comparison.



## WHY WELL?

Interface is a purpose-driven organization. Their employees come to work energized and work diligently to lead the industry in inspiring flooring solutions that, in their design and manufacture, are helping to reverse climate change. Consequently, when Interface needed a new world headquarters to support the health and well-being of their employees, replete with workplace choices that make coming to an office beneficial and supportive, they looked to the WELL Building Standard. Early in the planning process, Interface set the aspirational goal of achieving a high rating for both WELL v1 and LEED. They wanted to take the most holistic approach to the design of their new headquarters by creating a workplace that is both restorative for their people and for the planet. Interface intentionally chose to reuse an existing building from the 1960's, repurposing what was removed and choosing the lowest carbon-intensive specifications for everything that was reincorporated. They wanted to show other businesses who may be less risk tolerant that it is possible to do right by your people AND the environment with rigor and aspiration in your design intent.

## FEATURE HIGHLIGHTS



### MIND

#### Feature 88

Biophilia – Qualitative

#### Intent:

To nurture the innate human-nature connection within the project

Interface's Base Camp embodies the company's "factory as a forest" philosophy

[2]. The entire design of the building was inspired by nature. The floors of the building are divided into three biophilic-inspired ecologies. The fourth floor, known as the bluff, includes a community space that opens to a green roof terrace—providing employees quick access to the outdoors while at work. The first, second, and third floors, known as the forest, include a floor designed for socialization, one for quiet work, and one for exploration. The lower levels, known as the cave, include a parking garage, an area for visitors, and a 15,000-gallon rainwater cistern that provides water for the flush fixtures and is used to irrigate the greenery in the building and the rooftop garden. Floor-to-ceiling windows in the office allow for outside views and ample daylight. The exterior glass of the building is wrapped in a continuous graphic of a forest that allows natural light to stream into the office through the trees. According to the POE+M "right-now" questionnaire, 74% of Basecamp's employees report being satisfied with access to a view of outside from where they sit in the office. "Employees can see the city through a filter of nature, and the city can see Interface through the same filter", says Chip DeGrace, Director of Design Purpose at Interface [3]







## COMFORT

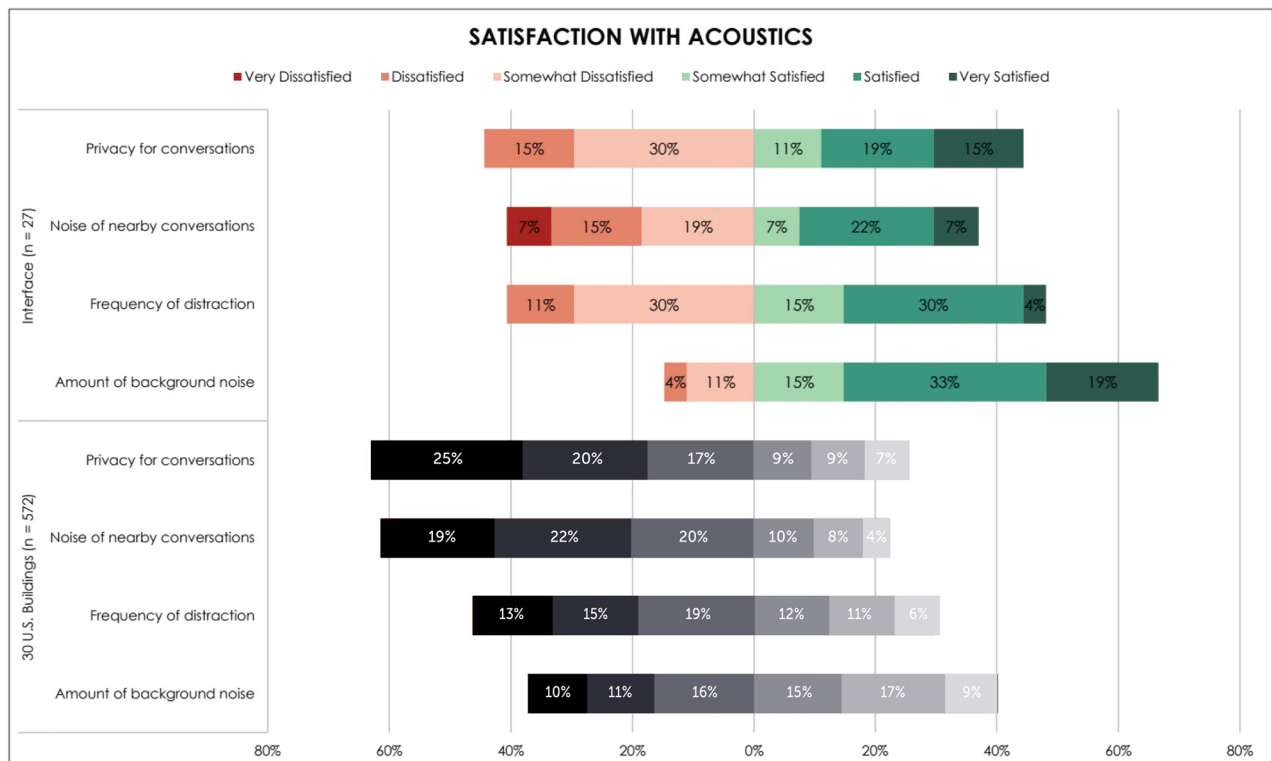
### Feature 75

#### Internally Generated Noise

##### Intent:

To reduce acoustic disruptions from internal noise sources and increase speech privacy

Bringing employees together in an open-plan office can be great for collaboration but a challenge for concentration. When designing Base Camp, Interface proactively looked at reducing internally generated noises that can cause disruptions and decrease speech privacy. They chose to install a dedicated outdoor air system (DOAS) plus chilled beam system because it is not only energy efficient but also quieter than conventional HVAC systems. “Rather than blowing high volumes of cold air for combined cooling and breathing that is typical of conventional HVAC systems in this region, the mechanical system in Base Camp increases ventilation rates through the dedicated outside air system (DOAS) and provides the quietest and most comfortable level of cooling through radiant ceilings (chilled beams),” explains Professor Vivian Loftness, Co-Director of the Center for Building Performance and Diagnostics (CBPD) at Carnegie Mellon University. In addition to installing a quieter HVAC system, Interface developed an acoustic plan to map loud and quiet areas of the building. The office was then programmed with spaces designed for either concentration or collaboration based on the noise level of the area in the building. The diversity of space types along with a “free address” policy offers employees flexibility in how and where they work within the office. A variety of Interface’s flooring types [4], [5], [6] were used throughout the building to help dampen internally generated noise [7] and guide employees’ behaviors based on the space type. Employees have grown accustomed to associating hard surface flooring, found in circulation and activity spaces, with spaces that are noisier and more active, and soft surface flooring, found in heads down and privacy spaces, with lower noise spaces. Acoustic satisfaction remains the greatest challenge in open plan offices. The combined design strategies have contributed to Base Camp employees reporting on the POE+M “right-now” questionnaire 15–20% higher satisfaction with privacy for conversations, noise from nearby workstations, and frequency of distraction and 30% higher satisfaction with the amount of background noise than a benchmark sample of 30 US offices [8].



Acoustic satisfaction at Interface Base Camp compared to a benchmark sample of 30 U.S. offices. Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. Percentage of neutral responses are not included in the graph.



## WATER

### Feature 30

#### Fundamental Water Quality

##### Intent:

To limit the presence of sediment and water-borne pathogens in water designated for human contact

WELL Feature 30 requires coliforms not be detected in water designated for human contact. Coliforms are naturally found in the environment, but their presence in water can be an indicator the water contains more dangerous pathogens. Coliforms have been detected in Atlanta's city drinking water and the amount of trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids, byproducts of using chlorine to disinfect water, have hovered close to the maximum containment levels accepted by the WELL Building Standard (see [Water Feature 34 Public Water Additives](#)). By using UV light to treat the building's water instead of chlorine, Interface was able to achieve Feature 30, while also avoiding the risk of creating more trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids in the water.

Parameter (units)	WELL Threshold	Interface**	City of Atlanta***
Total coliforms	ND*	ND	0.0%–1.4% of samples
Total chlorine (mg/L)	< 4	0.01	0.95–1.70
Total trihalomethanes (mg/L)	< 0.08	ND	0.029–0.069
Total haloacetic acids (mg/L)	< 0.06	ND	0.029–0.069

ND = not detected

\*\*December 18–20, 2019 onsite performance verification results for WELL Certification

\*\*\*2019 city of Atlanta regulated drinking water range of detection results [9]





## SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge Interface faced during the design process was bringing multiple stakeholders—including their employees—together in one room. Despite the challenge, one of Interface's greatest successes with Base Camp is the level of pride their employees have in their workplace. Having been engaged in the design process, Interface's employees feel a sense of ownership of the space knowing they took part in creating it.

The design strategies that Interface implemented to achieve WELL helped them to adapt successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic. A diversity of workspaces, including a green roof terrace that offers outdoor working areas, paired with a free address policy gives employees the choice of when, how, and where they work in the office. A dedicated outside air system (DOAS) is operated to continuously deliver filtered, conditioned, and dry outside air to all open plan areas and deliver the same quality of air to closed conference and focus rooms on demand.



## BUSINESS CASE

With WELL, Interface has been able to make an impact not only at the employee level, but also at the business and global levels. Interface is committed to providing transparent, credible information on the environmental and potential health impacts of their products [10] and continuously innovates with their products through the elimination of materials of concern. Interface's headquarters doubles as a living showroom, allowing employees to show clients how their flooring products can be incorporated in a WELL Certified space. In addition, Interface is a signatory to the UN Global Compact [11]. Their commitment to WELL aligns with various UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, and Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities [12].



## PROJECT TEAM

Owner: **Parkside Partners**

Project Manager: **JLL**

Building Architect: **MSTSD**

Design Architect: **Perkins&Will**

MEP Engineer: **Integral Consulting Engineering**

General Contractors: **Integra (core and shell) and Choate (interior)**

Commissioning: **Working Buildings**

Sustainability Consultant: **JLL**

Regenerative & Biophilic Design Consultant: **Terrapin Bright Green**

Acoustics Consultant: **Waveguide**

## CONTRIBUTORS/TEAM MEMBERS

**Heather Bazille**, Research Fellow, International WELL Building Institute

**Whitney Austin Gray**, SVP, Research, International WELL Building Institute

**Chip DeGrace**, Director, Design Purpose, Interface

**Erin Jende**, Director, Marketing Strategy and Integration, Interface

**Quanecia Kelly**, Market Development Manager, Interface

**Kat West**, VP, Sustainability, JLL

**Alexandra Bull**, Associate Sustainability Manager, JLL

**Vivian Loftness**, Co-Director, Center for Building Performance and Diagnostics, Carnegie Mellon University





## REFERENCES

- [1] <http://neat-cbpd.arc.cmu.edu/neat/manual/NEAT-Manual.pdf>
- [2] <https://blog.interface.com/revisiting-our-factory-as-a-forest-thinking/>
- [3] <https://resources.wellcertified.com/webcasts/re-wilding-the-city-evidence-and-future-trends-on-the-impact-of-nature-on-health-buildings-and-communities/>
- [4] <https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/resilient/lvt-benefits.html/>
- [5] <https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/carpet-tile/carpet-tile-benefits.html>
- [6] <https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/resilient/rigid-core-benefits.html>
- [7] <https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/carpet-tile/acoustics.html>
- [8] <https://www.springerprofessional.de/en/critical-frameworks-for-building-evaluation-user-satisfaction-en/14956852>
- [9] <https://www.atlantawatershed.org/water-quality-reports/>
- [10] <https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/sustainability/product-transparency.html>
- [11] <https://investors.interface.com/corporate-responsibility-esg/default.aspx>
- [12] <https://www.wellcertified.com/sdgs/v2>